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LEVEL news
Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 2, Number 12 **December 16, 1994**

Longer Shipping Season

Mild Weather Delays Ice

Mild weather through November and into early December has delayed ice formation in the St. Lawrence River and allowed an extension of the shipping season this year.

"With the water temperature slightly above average, we expect several days delay in the the freeze-up of the St. Lawrence," explains Peter Yee, Head of Environment Canada's Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Regulation Office in Cornwall.

Last year, ice brought the shipping season to a close on December 25.This year, the season has been extended to the end of December.

By mid December, ice had begun to form in parts of Lakes Superior and Huron, but the rest of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system remained open.

"As always, the weather will be the final deciding factor in how much longer ships will be able to transit the system," notes Yee.

Ice in the St. Lawrence River not only limits the shipping season, it limits flexibility in the regulation of outflows from Lake Ontario.

When ice begins to form, the river's flow must be temporarily reduced to promote formation of a stable ice cover. This cover, together with lower flows throughout the winter, helps prevent potentially damaging ice jams.

November Storms Raise Lake Erie Water Levels

High winds on November 21 and 28 caused high water level events on Lake Erie's northeast shores. Environment Canada issued a high water level watch on November 21 and a high water level warning on November 28.

Despite storm force winds gusting as high as 60 knots on November 28, no significant shoreline damage from either event was reported.

"The critical level for the eastern end of Lake Erie is 200 centimetres above

Chart Datum. On November 21, the lake's level rose by 71 cm, but this was still 55 cm below the critical level. On November 28, the lake's level rose to 11 cm below the critical value," explains Ralph Moulton, Manager of Environment Canada's Great Lakes Water Level Communications Centre in Burlington.

The critical level is the level at which significant flooding and other shoreline damage will begin to occur. If forecasters believe winds will cause the lake to surge near or above this level, a high water level watch or warning will be issued.

"The high winds did not cause severe flooding or shoreline damage because the level of Lake Erie is currently low enough to allow for a significant surge without reaching its critical level," explains Moulton.

Lake Erie began December at 18 cm above its long-term average, 13 cm lower than its beginning-of-December level in 1993. All of the Great Lakes began December at levels lower than they were a year ago; however, Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie remain between 18 and 22 cm above their long-term averages. Lakes Superior and Ontario continue very close to their seasonal averages.

Level Rises At Montréal

The water level at Montréal Harbour rose in November due to increased flows from the Ottawa River and other local tributaries. At the beginning of December, the Harbour's level was 17 cm higher than it was at the beginning of November.

The December average at Montréal is expected to be very similar to November's average of 64 cm above chart datum, as inflows from the Ottawa River increase and outflows from Lake Ontario decline.

While the December Harbour level is expected to be below average, it is forecast to be well above chart datum.

This forecast could vary over the winter months, depending upon ice conditions in the St. Lawrence River.

Ottawa Centre Offers Enhanced Services

As part of a new way of doing business with the public, Environment Canada opened a restructured Weather and Environmental Services Centre in Ottawa on November 30.

The Weather and Environmental Services Ottawa Regional Centre is one of four operations across the country that are taking advantage of recent advances in weather forecasting. A second Ontario centre is planned for Thunder Bay in 1995.

The newly refurbished centre will provide detailed weather information for Eastern Ontario and the National Capital Region.

In addition to more accurate and timely weather forecasts, the Centre will be

able to provide up-to-date information on Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River levels and flows. This will be made possible through links with the Great Lakes Water Level Communications Centre in Burlington and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Regulation office in Cornwall.

"Weather and related environmental information is crucial to the health, safety and security of all Canadians. The Ottawa Regional Centre is well equipped to provide timely and accurate weather forecasts and warnings and to satisfy the information needs of the residents of Eastern Ontario," said Ottawa Centre MP Mac Harb at the office's opening.

In addition to forecasting for the public, the Centre will provide specialized services to paying clients.The Centre's General Inquiry number is (613) 998-3440 (English) or (613) 998-8805 (French). The Centre's Client Relations number is (613) 990-7416.

Speakers Available

The Great Lakes Water Level Communications Centre is accepting bookings to speak to community, school and professional groups about Great Lakes water levels and related topics.

To book a speaker, phone, fax, write or email us.

Bookings are subject to availability of speakers.

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